

# All About Housekeeping and Home Matters in Canal Zone

BY FRANK G. CARPENTER.  
 ANCON, Canal Zone, Panama.—I have received many letters from the United States asking me to write of the American women at Panama. There are several thousand of them, and they come from every part of the Union. They vary in all classes and conditions, from the wives of the high officials, such as the commissioners, who draw their \$14,000 and upward a year, down to those of the lowest salaried clerks, who get \$200 or \$300 a month. Many of them are the wives of mechanics, of railroad engineers, of electricians and steam-shovel men, and not a few are nurses, school teachers and the daughters of employees of all classes. In general, I may say that the woman here is above the average of her sex in any American city.

She has been benefited by mixing with others of her sex from all parts of the country, by her travels down to the isthmus, and by a life here under different conditions than those which prevail anywhere else. She is often good-looking. She is almost universally healthy, and she lacks the lines and wrinkles of worry which so often beam the face of her sisters up North.

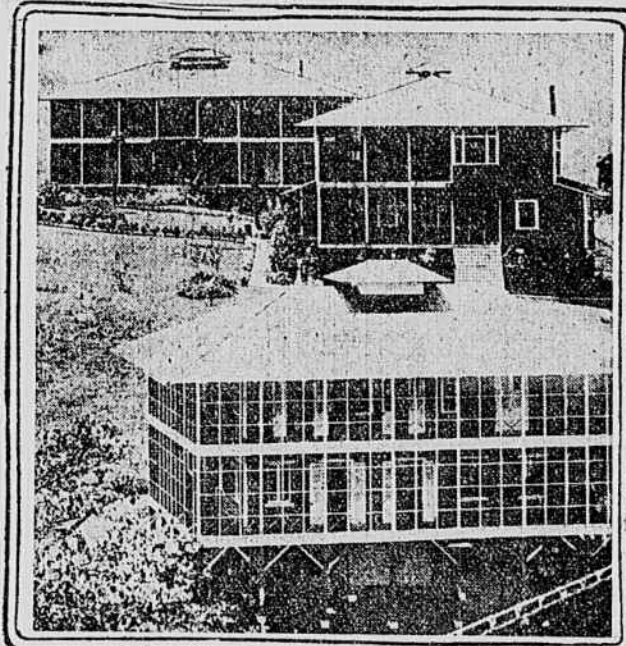
**Housekeeping on the Isthmus.**  
 In the first place she has an easier time than at home. Her housekeeping worries are less, and she has Uncle Sam for her landlord and he charges no rent. According to the contract with the men the government furnishes the quarters, and it gives each family a home according to the salary and rank its head holds in the work. The highest officials have magnificent residences, great two-story structures, many of the rooms of which are twenty feet square and so arranged that they open one into the other like a high class Japanese residence, letting the wind blow through from all sides. These houses are equipped with bathrooms of tile. They have furniture to correspond and are, as delightful homes for entertaining as a man of that class could wish.

Further down on the salary list are homes less pretentious, the quarters declining in character until they reach the two and four family houses of the more modest clerks. All of the homes are exceedingly comfortable, and all have wide verandas running about them which are so covered with woven awnings that the mosquitoes and gnats and the stinkiest insects cannot get in. Every house has its light on all sides, and all are surrounded by hedges of brilliant leaves of many colors, or by strange vines and tropical flowers. Uncle Sam is the gardener, and the lawns are watered and kept trimmed by West Indian negroes. The plants are to a certain extent the choice of the resident. Nearly every woman here is a flower lover, and there are wives of mechanics who have collections of orchids which would cost a small fortune in dear old New York.

**A Typical Home.**  
 But let me give you some pictures of one of the well-to-do homes on the isthmus. The man who lives in it is a railroad official, not the highest and not next to the highest. He is fairly well down in the ranks, and



"AMONG THE AMUSEMENTS ARE PICNICS."

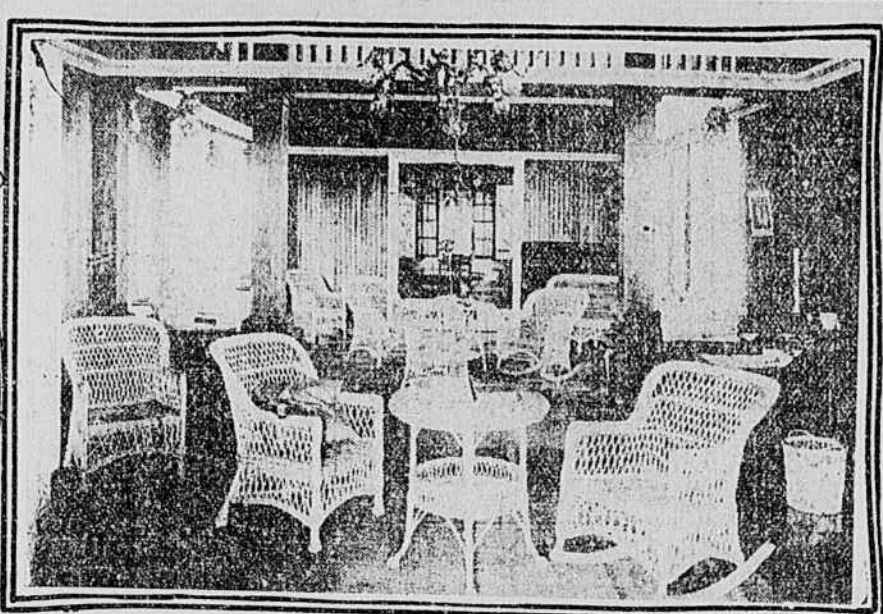


SOME OF UNCLE SAM'S MARRIED QUARTERS AT CULEBRA.

his salary is a little above \$200 per month. His home is the ordinary house which Uncle Sam furnishes to a man of that class. How shall I describe it? It is situated on the side of a hill here at

Ancon in plain view of the rolling Pacific. Back of it there is a row of royal palms, and about it a hedge of gorgeous red and green leaves. It has altogether a half dozen rooms and is surrounded by a wide porch

screened in with wire and covered with vines. Inside the wire, at the front, orchids and other air plants



THIS IS THE HOME OF A HIGH OFFICIAL.



"THERE ARE MASQUERADE BALLS AND MANY DANCES."

hanged from the roof, and also ferns in pots with leaves which extend from the ceiling quite down to the floor. Some of these ferns have fronds as those of the maiden-hair fern, and others have leaves, which look like the horns of a deer. There are chairs on the veranda, and this forms the out-of-door sitting room.

Entering the house you come into a living room, which is, I judge, eighteen feet square. At the left is a bedroom quite as large, and on the other side of the living room is a big dining room with a china closet built into the wall. There is also a drying room of about the size of an ordinary hall bedroom, which has an electric stove to keep the clothes from molding during the wet season and on the opposite side of this is a kitchen. The house was also a shower-bath and other modern conveniences.

**The Furniture.**  
 The furniture of the house is all supplied by Uncle Sam. It is simple, as it should be in the tropics. There are wicker chairs, including rockers, lounges, tables and stools, and the beds are as good as at any first-class hotel. The kitchen has a refrigerator and an iron cook stove. It has a porcelain sink, with plenty of fresh water from the Panama water works, and a garbage can, which is emptied daily by Uncle Sam's men. The light is electric, and costs less than housekeeping nothing. The only heat in the house is that of the cook stove, and this comes from soft coal furnished free by the government, and put in without charge. One feature of the kitchen is the little pans of coal oil in which the legs of the refrigerator and of the kitchen table stand. These are to prevent the many kinds of ants crawling up and getting at the provisions. Ants are the chief pest of the isthmus. They are of all sizes and of every variety. Some will eat wood, and others go for vegetables and everything sweet. If a woman has plants she must keep the pots in bowls of water or the ants will eat them, and if she should leave a piece of sugar out anywhere it will be black or red with these little insects.

**Some Marketing Arrangements.**  
 I wish you could have as good a dinner to-day as I had in this house I am describing. It was a Sunday dinner, and perhaps a little better than the ordinary meals, but it was quite as good as any you could serve in your home. We had a soup, a fish and a roast, with an entree or so, ending with coffee, Swiss cheese, ice cream and cake for dessert.

The most of the food came from the commissary department, which is practically the only source of supply. Uncle Sam runs a big grocery store here, and he furnishes about all the food that his 35,000 employees have to eat. He has a catalogue and price list of everything, and the prices are usually far below those of the States. For instance, the roast beef we had on the table came from Chicago. It was brought down frozen stiff in cold storage, and the price delivered at the house was 20 cents a pound.

You would do well to get such beef in your home market, and you would have to pay 30 cents at the least. But the engineer's commissary have about the same kind of an establishment that such men would have in the States. They have their cooks, butlers and chambermaids. A good cook gets about \$20, a butler \$15 and a chambermaid \$10. As to the washing and ironing, that is often done in the house by the cook when one has but two girls, and sometimes by Jamaican negroes, who come in and wash and iron for a dollar a day. We can also send our clothes to the government laundry, but it costs more, although the work is well done. Another trouble is the machines cut off the buttons.

**The Servant Question.**  
 I asked as to servants, and the lady replied: "The servants here are mostly Jamaican negroes. I keep but one girl and pay her \$15 gold a month. She has Thursday afternoon off, and she must also stay at home to get dinner Sunday. My girl is an excellent cook, and she is cheaper than ordinary. The highest officials have more servants, and the engineer's commissaries have about the same kind of an establishment that such men would have in the States. They have their cooks, butlers and chambermaids. A good cook gets about \$20, a butler \$15 and a chambermaid \$10. As to the washing and ironing, that is often done in the house by the cook when one has but two girls, and sometimes by Jamaican negroes, who come in and wash and iron for a dollar a day. We can also send our clothes to the government laundry, but it costs more, although the work is well done. Another trouble is the machines cut off the buttons."

**Where the Clothes Come From.**  
 One of the troubles of the woman of the isthmus is to get new clothing. There are practically no dressmakers among the Panamanians, and nearly everything has to be made at home and sent down. The government stores have some ready-made things, but these are mostly for men, and the women must either make their own clothes or order them from the States. I know some ladies who do this through the professional shoppers. They send in their measurements, and the gowns and other things are supplied on approval. The woman who does the shopping in the United States gets 15 per cent all that she buys, but this commission comes out of the merchant's pocket.

**As to wash dresses, many of them are made here in the homes. Some of the Canal Zone women do sewing, and there are a few Jamaica sewing girls and some of the native dress-makers in Panama and Colon. Linens are especially cheap, as Panama charges practically no duty upon them, and the same is true of the beautiful grass cloths known as Canton linens, which are shipped here from China and sold by the Chinese. Silks of all kinds are cheap, and skilfully silk stockings, shirt waist and skilfully women's clothing is much cheaper at Panama than at home, and this for the reason that she has to provide for only one season. The people wear summer clothes the year round, and they have no use for tailors and suits, fur nor costly garments of wool.**

**As to hats, there is, I believe, one French milliner, but most of the fancy hats come in from the States. The most popular everyday hat is the Panama or lipi-japi, pronounced lipi-japi. The lipi-japi sold here is a coarse. It is made of straw and shipped in from Ecuador. One can get a very fair one for \$3 or \$4, whereas a broad-brimmed Panama, beautifully made, will cost \$8, \$10 or \$15, and more. All of these hats are trimmed to suit the taste of the wearer, and often by the wearers themselves.**

**As a rule, the women of the isthmus dress well. They most of them have clothes which fit, and they know how to wear them. They have good wardrobes, and at a ball at the Tivoli Hotel you will see as many fine dresses and it seems to me more fine looking women than at a White House reception. We have here the wives and daughters of many army officers, and the employees of the government here are the best kind of their kind in the world and they all dress in good taste.**

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"What are your hours for meals?" "They vary in different houses. The ordinary meals are three: the first breakfast in coffee and rolls. This is served all the way from 5 until 9, according to the working hours of the man. The next meal is a substantial breakfast served about 11 or 12, and then there is a dinner at from 5 to 7. Most all of the ladies have afternoon tea at 3 or 4 o'clock. The usual calling hours are from 4 until 7, and nearly every one is in bed by 10."

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**Amusements, Dances and Masquerade Balls.**  
 And this brings me to the subject of the amusements of the isthmus. There is here a socially inclined, and there are a number of society sets, just as at home. There is the army set, consisting of the wives of the high officials and of the army and navy, for you know we have a regiment here and some of Uncle Sam's marines. Then there is a clerical set with divisions ranging somewhat according to salaries, and there is a society made up of the wives of the mechanics and others. All of these intermix more or less with one another, although there are certain well established distinctions and grades.

There is a considerable dinner giving and tea giving, and there are masquerade balls and many dances of one kind or another. There are dances every two weeks at the Tivoli Hotel, paid for by the Tivoli Club, which has 700 members. These dances are the events of the month and are attended by the women from all parts of the zone.

Among the other amusements are picnics to old Panama, Fort Lorenzo, the Island of Taboga, and day excursions out into the jungles. There are tennis games at every station, and among the women's sports is quite as common as it is at home.

**The Women's Club Movement.**  
 And then the women's clubs. You will find one or more of them at every station upon the Canal Zone, and their different activities cover every form of club work. There are Daughters of the American Revolution, and there are religious movements of one kind or other. Others are for social enjoyment, and others for intellectual culture. I know one club which is taking up Panama history this week.

And then there is a branch of the International Sunday School League, whose interests center around the work for blind babies in New York, and there are missionary societies of the various isthmian churches. Christal has a current events club, Culebra a Union Christian League Club, and there are private card clubs and bridge clubs galore.

We have also a number of women's guilds and altar societies, whose members are teachers in the Sunday schools of the Episcopal Church, a branch of the Women's Foreign Missionary Society, and the Methodist Church, which maintains two scholarships in the Methodist College in Panama, and a Gatum society, which has furnished the Gatum dormitory in the Arthur home at Summit, N. J. And then there are the women's auxiliaries of some of the secret order societies. We have the Daughters of the Goodwill, the Pythian Sisters, allied to the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers at Las Cascades, and the Alfarista Council of the Degree of Pochontas at Culebra.

All of the various clubs have their representatives in the Canal Zone Federation of Women, and these are working together for the bettering of the moral conditions on the isthmus. They keep their eyes on the schools, upon certain features of sanitation and upon the moral tone of the zone. Fully half of the women of the isthmus now belong to them, and altogether they have done a great deal of good.

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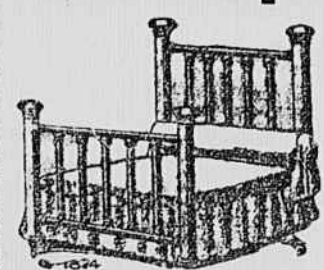
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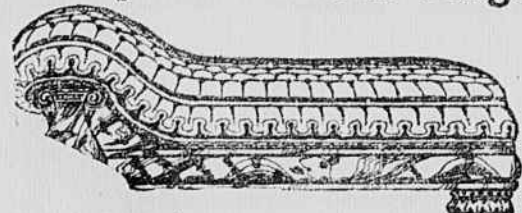
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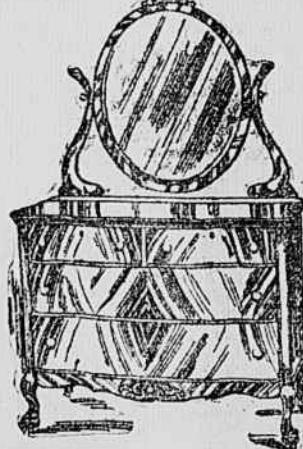
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